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STATE FOR G; CA/OCS/ACS/EAP; EAP/EX; EAP/BCLTV; EAP/EP; INR; OES/STC (MGOLDBERG); OES/IHA (DSINGER AND NCOMELLA) BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC, USAID/RDM/A (MFRIEDMAN) USDA FOR FAS/PASS TO APHIS DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISA/AP (LSTERN) USAID FOR ANE AND GH (DCARROLL, SCLEMENTS AND PCHAPLIN) STATE PASS USTR (ELENA BRYAN) STATE ALSO PASS HHS/OGHA (EELVANDER) ROME FOR FAO

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: AVIAN INFLUENZA WEEKLY REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 15, 2005

REF: A.) Hanoi 2324 B.) Hanoi 2289

¶1. (U) Summary. The United Nations Pandemic Preparedness Mission Team briefed the diplomatic community on its examination of the GVN Avian Influenza (AI) emergency plan on September 9. The team was impressed with the emergency plan (which has yet to be released) as a "first draft", but noted areas where improvements are needed. On September 15, the Ambassador announced a 500,000 USD grant by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (HHS/CDC) to Vietnam's National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology (NIHE) to strengthen Vietnam's influenza surveillance network. Press reports and sources within the government allege deficiencies with the GVN's poultry vaccination program. The British Embassy will host Consular Preparedness Workshop on Pandemic Contingency Plans Tuesday, September 20, 2005. At the workshop, ConOff will present a summary of the Mission's AI contingency plan, and will hear presentations on emergency plans by WHO, UNDP and the British and French Embassies. End Summary.

AI-Related Cases

¶2. (U) For the second consecutive week, no new AI cases were reported in Vietnam. The suspected AI death on August 28 from Soc Son, near Hanoi (Ref B), has not yet been reported to WHO as a confirmed AI case by the Ministry of Health.

USG Assistance to Vietnam for AI

¶3. (U) On September 15, the Ambassador announced a HHS-funded cooperative agreement, valued at 500,000 USD this year, between HHS/CDC and Vietnam's National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology (NIHE) to strengthen Vietnam's influenza surveillance network. The project is anticipated to total 2.5 million USD over five years, subject to funding availability. By enhancing systematic collection of virological and epidemiological information for influenza, Vietnam will more effectively be able to monitor and track influenza viruses and disease activities in-country as well as to understand the impact influenza has on Vietnam's population. Improving the influenza surveillance system will facilitate more rapid detection of changes to influenza viruses, including possible changes to the avian virus H5N1.

¶4. (U) Post learned this week that the special USG 25 million USD appropriations signed in May will support Vietnam's fight against AI with a grant of approximately two million USD to support the joint program of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Animal Organization (FAO) in Vietnam. The grant will support the joint WHO/FAO efforts to monitor and support the GVN's Emergency Plan to combat an AI outbreak, especially in the area of its vaccination program.

UN Debrief on GVN Avian Influenza Emergency Plan

¶5. (U) A UN Pandemic Preparedness Mission Team, here last week to advise the GVN on its draft AI emergency response plan, debriefed the diplomatic community on September 9. Team leader Dr. Felix Li repeatedly characterized the GVN's AI plan as a good "first draft", lauding it's command/control and communications aspects. However, Dr. Li criticized the draft plan for focusing primarily on ameliorative efforts at WHO pandemic stage 6. He stated the

most important phase is now, planning to prevent movement to WHO phases 4 or 5, rather than planning solely for how to save lives after a pandemic stage is reached. Dr. Li expressed his opinion that Vietnam is the location holding the highest risk for spawning a pandemic.

16. (U) While the team conducted an important first outsider's review of the GVN emergency planning, details of the plan were not/not released. According to the team, the GVN needs to answer questions such as: How will the GVN maintain essential services (fire, water, telecom, etc.) in case of an AI outbreak? How to conduct vaccinations and who to target? Will the plan be updated and will the GVN practice the scenarios on the local level? The team will complete its report with recommendations concerning the GVN emergency plan soon and may share the report with the international community after consultations with the GVN.

GVN Vaccination Program

17. (U) Vietnam News Agency reported that Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City would commence vaccinating poultry against AI on September 15. Supervised vaccinations of household poultry in Hanoi will be carried out on a trial basis.

18. (SBU) Asked about recent press reports critical of the government's pilot vaccination program, sources within the government confide that problems have arisen supplying vaccine. The problems do not appear related to finances but instead to confusion and conflicts between the private importers of the vaccine and various government agencies. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) officials acknowledge "minor" problems but claims that these issues have been worked out and the vaccination program is on schedule. They deny any problem with inadequate resources for the vaccination program, but an impression exists of an agency strapped for equipment, supplies, and qualified workers -- and frustrated by slow and uncoordinated international donor response.

Update on USDA TDYer Dr. Cheryl Hall

19. (U) USDA has identified Dr. Cheryl Hall, a USDA/APHIS veterinarian who is expert in poultry disease, for a long-term TDY as an Embassy Science Fellow in Vietnam to assist the AI effort. According to MARD officials, improving field laboratories' diagnostic capacity would be the best use of Dr. Hall's expertise. However, this will require funds to cover interpreters and extensive in-country travel for Dr. Hall as well as new equipment and training for the laboratories. MARD cannot cover these expenses and current funding in place for Dr. Hall falls short of covering even interpreters and in-country travel. Additional funding is necessary to justify her TDY. The most likely source would seem to be the funds available under the USAID Action Plan, which includes general activities closely in line with Dr. Hall's proposed work.

British To Host AI Contingency Conference September 20

10. (U) The British Embassy will convene a Consular Workshop on Pandemic Preparedness Plans on Tuesday, September 20, 2005. Billed as an opportunity to compare pandemic preparedness plans in the event of WHO Phase 4 (or higher) Alert, the British hope to coordinate planning and assist smaller embassies develop contingency plans. AMEmbassy Hanoi ConOff will present a summary of our Mission's AI contingency plan, and hear presentations on emergency plans by WHO, UNDP and the British and French Embassies. We will also utilize this opportunity to present core principles of the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza (IPAPI) to an expanded audience - approximately 30 embassies, UN agencies and key INGOs are expected to attend.

Other AI Related Issues

11. (U) CARE International in Vietnam will support the Vietnamese Government and local organizations in a project to prevent the spread of AI. With funding of approximately 138,000 USD from New Zealand's Agency for International Development (NZAID), the project's goal is to assist in the prevention, containment and management of AI in Binh Dinh and Long An provinces.

12. (U) The Embassy will provide AI-related medical training for Embassy guards and first responders this week. Also, the Med Unit has organized AI discussion sessions for employees and family members on September 21.